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## POLITICS AND POLICY

# Waxman Joins List Of Retiring Democrats

By JANET HOOK

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Rep. Henry Waxman, right, with Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse (D., R.I.), said Thursday that he wouldn't run for re-election this year. *Getty Images*

Rep. [Henry Waxman](#), a 20-term veteran of Congress who helped forge major health, safety and environmental laws, announced Thursday that he won't run for re-election.

The California Democrat was part of the big class of liberals elected in 1974 in the aftermath of the Watergate scandal. He has played a central role in investigating the tobacco industry, tightening provisions of clean-air and clean-water laws and shepherding Medicaid and health laws through the House, including the [Affordable Care Act](#) championed by President [Barack Obama](#).

His legislative legacy, regarded by many conservative Republicans as a monument to government overreach and overregulation, is a touchstone in a broader debate about the size and role of government.

"I first ran for office because I believe government can be a force for good in people's lives," Mr. Waxman said in a statement. "And I will leave the House of Representatives with my conviction intact."

Mr. Waxman is the seventh House Democrat to announce his retirement, including veteran legislators such as Reps. George Miller of California and Jim Moran of Virginia. Ten House Republicans have said they won't seek re-election. Five Democrats and nine Republicans also have said they are leaving to run for the Senate or other offices.

Republicans portrayed Mr. Waxman's decision as a sign that senior Democrats lack confidence in their party's ability to regain control of the House in November. "House Democrats don't think they'll be wielding the gavel next time," said Rep. Greg Walden (R., Ore.), chairman of the National Republican Congressional Committee.

But the 74-year-old Mr. Waxman, whose liberal-leaning Los Angeles district is likely to remain in Democrat hands, said House control wasn't part of his decision. "Even in today's environment, there are opportunities to make real progress," he said. "It's time for someone else to have the chance to make his or her mark."

Mr. Waxman has been a leader of the liberal wing of his party through four decades of tumultuous political change, from his own party's move to the center in the 1990s to the rise of tea party-inspired Republicans in recent years to a prominent role in the House. He had a pragmatic streak that found an outlet in prolific legislating. He managed to advance liberal goals even during the conservative presidency of Ronald Reagan. He pushed a major expansion of Medicaid in the 1980s and a children's health program in the 1990s.

For more than a decade, Mr. Waxman, battled fellow Democrat, Rep. John Dingell (D., Mich.), to enact stricter air pollution controls in the 1990 Clean Air Act. He had a big hand in writing legislation to more tightly regulate tobacco and discourage cigarette smoking, and to advance AIDs treatment.

Mr. Waxman scored a controversial coup among House Democrats in 2008 when, after Mr. Obama was elected, he unseated Mr. Dingell as chairman of the powerful Energy and Commerce Committee. That gave him control of the panel just as it faced the challenge of helping to write the new health-care law. He also helped pass a cap-and-trade bill to combat global warming, but that measure died in the Senate.

A conservative Republican backlash against those health and environment measures contributed to the rise of the tea-party activists who helped the GOP win control of the House in 2010.

Mr. Waxman said in his retirement statement that "I abhor the extremism" of the tea party, but added that he wasn't quitting because of it.

"I am embarrassed that the greatest legislative body in the world too often operates in a partisan intellectual vacuum, denying science, refusing to listen to experts and ignoring facts," he said. "But I am not leaving out of frustration with Congress."

Mr. Waxman's district, which includes Malibu and Santa Monica, became slightly less Democrat leaning in the last round of redistricting, but remains a party stronghold. After cruising to re-election for decades, in 2012 Mr. Waxman won with only 54% of the vote.

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